



Media Statement

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OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS ENDANGERING FEMALE VETERINARIANS

WA-based research has revealed that many female veterinarians could be at increased risk of reproductive problems due to exposure to occupational hazards.

The study, carried out by researchers from the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) and The University of Western Australia's School Of Population Health as part of Dr Adeleh Shirangi's PhD, investigated the exposure to dangers such x-rays, anaesthetic gas and pesticides on female veterinarians.

Associate Professor Lin Fritschi from WAIMR said the study was the first national survey to look at exposure to health risks among female veterinarians in Australia.

"With increasing proportions of vet graduates being female, this survey highlights some important health issues for the veterinary profession," she said.

"We found that about 2 in 3 vets surveyed spent five or more hours a week in an operating suite or recovery room area, and that nearly a quarter of these did not take steps to reduce their exposure to anaesthetic gases.

"We also discovered that 8 in 10 vets used lead aprons to protect themselves while taking x-rays, but a great deal of them did not use other protective devices such as gloves, screens or film holders."

A/Prof Fritschi said the results, gathered from a survey of nearly 1200 female vets in Australia, were of concern.

"The exposure to these hazards is certainly very worrying because we know that they can directly affect fertility and pregnancy, as well overall health," she said.

"The study brings to the fore that more priority may need to be given to avoiding unnecessary exposure to vet in clinics.

"Properly ventilating the workplace, minimising the amount of exposure through radiation protection measures such as masks, shoes and gloves is of vital importance.

"It is also essential that the vets themselves take part in the planning of preventive measures, and in training and educating the profession about how and when to use protective devices at work."

Vets at increased risk of dangerous exposures included graduates, vets under 30 years of age, those working in a mixed animal practice and vets working more than 45 hours a week. The study results have been published in the Australian Veterinary Journal.

Dr Shirangi, of Claremont, is now heading to London as part of a National Health & Medical Research Council fellowship to pursue further research on women's health.

Media contact: Natalie Papadopoulos m: 0407 984 435